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Report on joint programming

Report by the UNDP Administrator and UNFPA Executive Director

Summary

At its annual session 2003, the Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA adopted decisions 2003/7 and 2003/18, requesting that the Administrator of UNDP and the Executive Director of UNFPA submit for consideration at its annual session 2004 "an assessment, based on specific country examples, of UNDP/UNFPA experiences in joint programming and other innovative and collaborative approaches aimed at improving programming effectiveness and reducing transaction costs for programme countries". The present report, a response to that request, focuses on joint programming between United Nations organizations. Much of the information used in this analysis has come from evidence provided in the process of revising the Guidance Note on Joint Programming.

Elements of a decision

The Executive Board may take steps to foster an enabling environment for joint programming through: (a) renewed commitment of resources, centred on achieving the MDGs; (b) flexibility in accepting common reporting in lieu of reporting by individual organizations; (c) support for common administrative procedures in a joint programme, including convergence toward a common methodology for calculating indirect costs for a specific joint programme, fully recognizing that these costs may differ between agencies as they reflect different cost structures among United Nations organizations; and (d) coherent, consistent messages regarding further progress on simplification and harmonization initiatives, from Member States as both members of the Executive Board and the respective governing councils of funds, programmes and specialized agencies.

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I. Introduction

1. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) focus on specific, globally accepted agreements and targets, which are increasingly reflected in national goals and priorities, and provide a new focus for United Nations collaboration at the country level. In the past, forms of joint and collaborative programming frequently peaked in achieving goals set forth in international summits and conventions.

2. Enhanced efforts to align international development cooperation around national priorities and systems, in line with the Rome Declaration on Harmonization of 25 February 2003, are often reflected in support for national poverty reduction strategies and programmes. The new guidelines for the common country assessment (CCA) and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) issued in October 2003 fully align the United Nations system with these arrangements. The UNDAF results matrix and the alignment of individual country programmes with UNDAF outcomes provides a solid, strategic, systematic basis for more joint programming. Previously, donor interest and access to funds often determined interest in joint programming.

3. While the first Guidance Note on Joint Programming 2000 did not provide sufficient programmatic and administrative guidance to implement joint programmes efficiently and systematically, the revised Guidance Note 2004 has addressed various deficiencies and clarified the difference between joint programming and joint programmes.[1] The Guidance Note will be revised periodically based on experience with the new procedures and country team feedback.

II. Analysis

4. The review was conducted by examining UNDP and UNFPA annual reports to identify joint programmes, the results of country visits and video conferences used in preparing the revised Guidance Note, and through a request to country teams to provide examples of joint programmes and innovative, collaborative approaches. A database of some 30 examples of joint programming was used.

The MDGs – a renewed opportunity for joint programming

5. The MDGs constitute a comprehensive framework for reducing poverty by 2015, which, under the leadership and ownership of national authorities, provides a unique opportunity for joint programming between United Nations organizations and with other development partners. While United Nations organizations have different

1 The revised Guidance Note on Joint Programming 2004 clarifies joint programming as the collective effort by which United Nations organizations and national partners work together to prepare, implement, monitor and evaluate activities aimed at effectively and efficiently achieving the MDGs and other commitments from international conferences. Through joint programming, common results and modalities for supporting programme implementation are identified, making United Nations support for national goals more coherent, effective and efficient. It is meant to avoid duplication, reduce transaction costs and maximize synergies among national partners and different contributions of United Nations system organizations. A joint programme is a set of activities contained in a common work plan and related budget, involving two or more United Nations organizations and (sub-) national partners. The work plan and budget will form part of a joint programme document, which will also detail roles and responsibilities of partners in coordinating and managing the joint activities. The joint programme document is signed by all participating organizations and (sub-) national partners.

mandates and goals, no single organization can generate the expertise and resources required to assist programme countries in achieving the MDGs by 2015, for which increased collaboration and coordination are indispensable. Country teams have collaborated with national stakeholders in advocacy, consultation, statistical and analytical work to prepare some 58 national reports on progress towards achieving the MDGs. Another 72 reports will be produced by end 2004. Six countries will have produced their second reports. Developing DEVINFO – a statistical database that provides a method to organize, store and display data in a uniform format, facilitating data sharing at the country level – is noteworthy as a collaborative United Nations Development Group (UNDG) activity for country teams, national statistical offices and national government departments. Based on country experiences, a more systematic roll-out phase began in April 2004 in 20 countries.

United Nations reform calls for intensified joint programming

6. Since their introduction in 1997, the CCA and UNDAF have been continuously improved to reflect country experience and global developments, such as the adoption of the MDGs and the Rome Declaration. The 2001 triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development (E/1998/48) noted weaknesses in the first generation CCA/UNDAF, notably the lack of strategic focus and a clearly defined, agreed on results framework in UNDAFs. The programmatic link between UNDAFs and country programmes of individual organizations was also considered weak. The UNDAF process did not sufficiently facilitate joint programming or the formulation of joint programmes.

7. CCA/UNDAF guidelines were revised in October 2003, with strong emphasis placed on using UNDAF as the instrument for defining the United Nations system's collective, coherent response to national priorities within the framework of the MDGs and other international goals. The CCA/UNDAF is now mandatory in the country programming process; country programme outcomes and results of the four UNDG Executive Committee members must be linked to the UNDAF results matrix.

8. Central to new UNDAFs is their focus on a limited set of three to five priorities selected from challenges identified in the CCA process. Their selection is driven by the collective comparative advantage of the United Nations system in addressing the challenges identified, as seen by the Government, the country team and other partners. The priorities are expressed as outcomes in the UNDAF results matrix.

Joint programming, not systematically identified, offers potential for greater effectiveness

9. United Nations organizations are increasingly cooperating in harmonizing their efforts around national priorities. A closer look at those initiatives, however, reveals that efforts in joint programming have not been systematically identified through the country programming process. Country offices have frequently reported that joint programmes were most easily identified when practical multi-sectoral approaches were employed to achieve specific development goals, or when they were deployed in common geographical areas. Joint programmes were most prevalent in humanitarian responses, HIV/AIDS, gender, women's and youth issues. United

Nations organizations have also worked together in conducting joint studies, joint assessments and discrete joint activities.

10. The value added of joint programming is visible in its effectiveness and efficiency. Preliminary indications show that effectiveness has increased as a result of the added value of a coordinated approach to complex, multi-dimensional issues, allowing United Nations organizations to complement their technical strengths. Refinements to the CCA/UNDAF guidelines and other simplification and harmonization processes have also strengthened teamwork at the country level, and enhanced United Nations system collaboration by disseminating knowledge of their activities. Some programmes note greater public awareness of critical issues and greater visibility of the United Nations as a whole.

Joint programme in the Philippines: a multi-sectoral approach in post-crisis

An example of joint programming featuring integrated efforts in a complex emergency situation is the Government/United Nations multi-donor programme for conflict areas in Mindanao. Initially designed to support the 1996 peace agreement between the Government and the Moro National Liberation Front, the multi-donor programme has supported peace and development efforts in Mindanao since 1997. In its third phase, it has adopted a community-based approach to peace-building. The current phase includes a joint needs assessment, involving a wider number of partners such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank.

The nexus of programme implementation is the Peace and Development Community (PDC), an area of convergence for various interventions by United Nations organizations in collaboration with local government. Interventions are pursued through seven components of the programme as follows: capacity-building through the empowerment of the PDC; building partnerships and strengthening institutional support mechanisms; special emergency relief and rehabilitation (UNDP); access to basic social services – reproductive health (UNFPA); community enterprise and entrepreneurship development (International Labour Organization); sustainable livelihoods (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations); and confidence-building through advocacy and promotion of a culture of peace (UNDP). An eighth component, programme management and coordination, is managed by a programme coordination and support team, which provides common administrative services and operational support for field-level coordination, thus reducing field costs for individual organizations. It also serves as the anchor for teamwork among programme components and area teams.

The joint programme finds added value in engaging national, regional and local partners in programme implementation, contributing to local capacity development, and confidence and partnership building among communities and government agencies. It has generated local resources and parallel funds to complement programme efforts. The programme's integrated and coordinated approach allows for immediate, effective responses to varying concerns at the community level.

Thematic groups on HIV/AIDS: multi-sectoral approach to multi-sectoral problem

11. Thematic groups offer a forum for United Nations organizations to share information and experience on common areas of interest. Most HIV/AIDS theme

groups initially had 'integrated' plans that were generally a compilation of individual organizations' activities. A further review of recent experiences shows that many theme groups now stress the importance of a common vision underpinning the integrated work plan. The MDGs, the General Assembly Special Session Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, and other relevant international conference commitments provide the guidance for this more strategic approach.

Joint programme on fighting AIDS-related stigma and discrimination in China

In China, the United Nations Theme Group on HIV/AIDS adopted the overall motto 'breaking the silence' in its work to meet the MDGs in the area of HIV/AIDS. The Fighting AIDS-Related Stigma and Discrimination Programme Accelerated Fund has leveraged the capacity of each co-sponsoring organization of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) to intensify work with vulnerable groups or on topics where advocacy was needed in an integrated manner. The main focus is shifting from advocacy to joint situation analysis and programming.

UNDP concentrates on legal reform, greater involvement of people living with HIV/AIDS and initiatives linked to poverty reduction. UNFPA works with vulnerable groups, while UNICEF works with civil society, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the media. ILO targets labour in the workplace and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) focuses on the de-stigmatization of intravenous drug users. UNESCO intervention reaches out through its Education for All programme, while the World Health Organization (WHO) ensures that health care is provided in a non-discriminatory way. The World Bank works closely with United Nations organizations under the integrated work plan.

Joint initiative to support PRSP process in Azerbaijan

12. A unified United Nations approach to issues such as the poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) also calls for joint initiatives. A recent assessment of the United Nations contribution to PRSPs noted that the organization's comparative advantage is to supplement, where needed, PRSP assessments of the causes of poverty in the United Nations organizations' areas of specialization. It found that most PRSPs adequately presented the macro-economic analysis but did not thoroughly analyze the root causes of poverty.

In Azerbaijan, a multi-agency effort led by the Office of the Resident Coordinator, which included a cost-sharing contribution from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and parallel financing from UNDP, UNFPA and the United Nations Department for Public Information (UNDPI), seeks to assist the State Programme for Poverty Reduction and Economic Development (SPPRED – the country's PRSP) secretariat and its poverty monitoring unit to improve and systemize the indicators to measure MDG targets. A critical output will be an annual MDG report incorporated into the annual SPPRED/PRSP report. The integration of both reports will help to position the PRSP as a step towards realizing the MDGs, thereby increasing government ownership of the MDGs, linking it to their poverty reduction strategy. It will also work to increase public knowledge of the MDGs.

Reducing transaction costs through joint missions

13. The reduction of transaction costs through joint missions, field trips and coordination units and by working with only one United Nations organization in distributing funds leads to greater efficiency. While some countries note that the planning of joint programmes is lengthier than programmes implemented by individual United Nations organizations, they also note that the benefits of joint programmes outweigh the costs. Mauritania is one example where the joint programme actually reduced transaction costs.

Joint programme in Mauritania

In Mauritania, joint missions replaced organization-specific missions. The joint programme on educating adolescent girls in support of community development aims to improve their lives by contributing to government efforts to reduce gender and racial disparities, and to encourage equitable, sustainable development by reinforcing the capacity and participation of girls in social, economic and political life. UNDP provides financial support to families to support girls' education. UNICEF supports teacher training, a social mobilization campaign, and creates community-based boarding houses for girls. UNFPA supports curriculum development while UNICEF and WHO work together to improve secondary school infrastructure. The project is the first attempt to coordinate field-level implementation adequately. Joint project mid-term reviews have taken place with coordinated technical support from UNFPA and UNICEF.

Revised Guidance Note provides improved guidance on joint programming and joint programmes

14. The revised Guidance Note attempts to provide programmatic and administrative guidance to seize opportunities presented through joint programming. One concern has been that joint programmes were at times stemming mainly from donor interest and availability of funds – and not anchored in existing country programmes. While these programmes were able to achieve concrete results, they were perceived as add-ons to the respective programmes of United Nations organizations. For instance, one donor provided funds to UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO to cooperate in 11 countries with governments, NGOs, community action groups and adolescents to break new ground in addressing the needs and meeting the challenges of adolescent girls. The Adolescent Girls Initiative has played a key role in placing 'adolescence' at the forefront of the development agenda among partners, and towards achieving the larger goal for young people identified in the MDGs.

15. While the programme was a positive opportunity to focus on this important issue, the joint programmes often took much time to develop. Joint programmes were often identified at a later stage of programme implementation, and many United Nations organizations did not have the ability to respond with funds on an ad-hoc basis when such opportunities arose. Some United Nations organizations were unable to move as quickly as others, owing to the lack of programmatic rationale in integrating joint programmes in the development of UNDAF. The revised Guidance Note addresses these constraints.

UNDAF results matrix and process identify areas for joint programming

16. The weak link between UNDAF and individual agency country programmes and country strategies was one reason for delays. Central to more coherent United Nations programming at the country level is the UNDAF results matrix. It aims to strengthen links between UNDAF and country programme priorities of individual organizations, highlighting connections between national goals/targets and UNDAF and country programme outcomes, in tandem with associated resource requirements.

17. Because it identifies common outcomes to which each United Nations organization contributes, the matrix is instrumental in pinpointing areas for joint programming. It was introduced in 2003 to five country teams – Benin, Ecuador, Kenya, Niger and Pakistan – that were developing a new UNDAF. A workshop in January 2004 with representatives of the country teams confirmed its usefulness. By 2008 all countries with an UNDAF are expected to have completed the matrix.

UNDAF results matrix highlights prospects for joint programming in Kenya

In Kenya, one of the five countries starting a new cycle of harmonized programmes in 2004, the process of developing the UNDAF results matrix has helped to identify areas where United Nations organizations can bring together their different expertise, operational capacities and financial resources. In one joint programme, because the results matrix identified the common result, each United Nations organization was able to link its outputs and activities to improve the overall design. The WFP school-feeding programme supported the UNICEF girls' education programme via improved water, sanitation and hygiene, buttressed by the UNDP environmental assessment programme. An inter-agency task force is working out the modalities of implementing joint programmes based on the revised Guidance Note.

While the UNDAF results matrix offers greater potential to identify joint programmes thanks to its focus on results, the UNDAF process itself prepared the foundation for better cooperation, sharing information and highlighting common areas of support. In 2003 a joint programme was initiated to support the Central Bureau of Statistics in data collection, storage and dissemination of gender disaggregated data and information to help in tracking of MDGs. This was an initiative of five United Nations organizations: UNDP, UNIFEM, UNICEF, UNFPA and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (HABITAT).

UNDAF-based joint programme in Nicaragua: Building capacities through integrated approaches

In Nicaragua, the CCA/UNDAF identified the need to improve the systems of civil registry and vital statistics as a tool for national and local planning and evaluation processes. As a result, organizations were able to give a coherent response to complex problems, including through socio-demographic and cultural perspectives. The value that each organization adds includes UNDP strengthening aspects of good governance and decentralization; UNICEF focusing on the importance of registering children and monitoring human rights; WHO ensuring more accurate statistics on mortality; and UNFPA helping to modernize civil registry and vital statistics to ensure a reliable national statistics system, including conducting censuses every ten years and periodic surveys.

UNDAF in Mauritius identifies joint programme for adolescents and youth

The UNDAF identified the need for an integrated development programme for adolescents and youth in a geographical area. Each organization involved was guided by its mandate, and contributed to the overall promotion of the programme by reinforcing actions taken by others and/or contributing to another dimension of adolescent and youth development. Local implementing agents undertook a number of activities initiated by United Nations organizations.

UNICEF provided life skills training and employment opportunities for out-of-school adolescents. UNDP managed a micro-credit project so that youth benefiting from UNICEF training could find placement. UNFPA and WHO provided support on reproductive health and HIV/AIDS prevention. These interventions were coordinated with government and civil society using a community-based approach, emphasizing participation of target groups in activity design and implementation.

UNDAF in Egypt identifies joint programme for developing institutional capacities for women's advancement and empowerment

The UNDAF identified the need to support institutional capacity through orientation, sensitization and training programmes to advance and empower women. Led by UNIFEM, the purpose of the joint programme was to build on the comparative advantages and mandates of UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and UNIFEM to support the multi-faceted mission of the National Council for Women. In addition to the value added of the collective inputs, writing a joint evaluation report helped to reduce transaction costs.

Revised Guidance Note addresses administrative and procedural barriers to joint programming

18. The review of country experiences and the subsequent revision of the Guidance Note showed that in addition to the lack of programmatic guidance for joint programmes, a number of areas needed additional guidance: (a) better guidance on operational procedures for joint programmes; (b) harmonized understanding of results-based management and related terminology; and (c) recognition that joint programmes may reduce the visibility of contributions made by individual United Nations organization. These areas have been addressed, as explained below.

Introduction of 'pass-through' fund management option and standard agreements

19. The first Guidance Note referred to parallel and pooled fund management for joint programmes. It did not, however, provide operational guidance on how to apply such modalities or an option to "pass through" funds from one agency to another. The revised Guidance Note takes into account progress achieved in United Nations reform and the recommendations of the 2001 triennial comprehensive policy review, and introduces detailed guidance on three fund management options to be applied on the basis of a programmatic rationale. It introduces a new mechanism for passing funds through one United Nations organization to another,

and clarifies the value added of joint programming. The Guidance Note includes standard legal agreements for the pooling and pass-through fund management options. A number of efforts are underway to internalize the Guidance Note into organizations' respective procedures.

Pass-through fund management option in Bangladesh

An example where the lack of clear guidance on the pass-through modality slowed down progress in the finalization of a joint programme was the recently approved safe motherhood programme in Bangladesh. The United Nations Joint Safe Motherhood Initiative (UNJSMI) is a unique programme to ensure that all interventions are focused to attain safe motherhood in a particular geographical area. Seven organizations – FAO, UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, WFP, WHO with UNFPA in the lead – are concentrating in their own areas of expertise to decrease maternal mortality and morbidities through a synergistic effort to coordinate activities with funding from a bilateral donor. The project document signed between the Government and UNFPA on behalf of the participating organizations is the first on joint programming in Bangladesh. The UNJSMI is also part of a sector-wide approach by donors to support the Health Population and Nutrition Programme. The revised Guidance Note presents standard agreements that can be used for the pass-through fund management mechanism, which saves country team efforts.

Coordination mechanism

20. Some country examples reviewed confirmed that one of the reasons for the lengthy development stage of joint programmes has been the lack of proper planning and the allocation of insufficient resources particularly during the preparatory phase. The review reconfirmed that proper coordination takes time and appropriate attention to management requirements of a joint programme from the outset is key.

21. The Guidance Note suggests that participating organizations may wish to formalize a coordinating mechanism with national partners using, to the extent possible, already existing structures such as theme groups. This approach would develop a common work plan, consisting of shared objectives, actions, timeframes, resource requirements and clear delineation of responsibilities. Emphasis on a common work plan is underpinned by a coherent vision, reflecting United Nations organizations' collective contributions and joint strategies for the joint programme.

Developing a harmonized methodology for calculating indirect costs

22. Executive Board members recognize that United Nations organizations have diverging cost structures resulting from differences in mandates, field presence and operations, and their different funding patterns. The different recovery rates for indirect costs are a necessary reflection of these structural variations. Nevertheless, United Nations organizations participating in a joint programme are often pressured by donors to accept the same recovery rate for indirect costs, possibly forcing them to use regular resources to subsidize costs associated with joint programme.

23. While the cost structures for each organization are different, the methodology used to calculate recovery rates should be harmonized. Organizations have initiated discussion on harmonizing the principles for cost recovery as part of the Budget and Finance Network under the High-Level Committee on Management. Members of the network have agreed that it is important to harmonize the conceptual approach among organizations and not necessarily the applicable rates. Consequently, while the recovery rate is likely to vary among organizations participating in a joint programme, the method of assessing and classifying cost should be the same.

24. Members of the Budget and Finance Network also noted that once a new system of indirect costs has been agreed, waivers to the policy should be kept to a strict minimum, while accepting that executive heads would need to retain the authority to grant exceptions when circumstances so warrant.

Different understanding of results-based management terms

25. UNDG member organizations recognize their different understandings and use of terms such as 'outcome', 'output', and 'activity'. They have thus sought to harmonize terms used in planning, such as UNDAF results matrix. Results-based management terms were synchronized as part of the overall UNDG simplification and harmonization process. Organizations and country teams should now use country programme, programme component, projects and activities when describing the hierarchy in the programme structure, and employ goal, outcome and outputs when referring to the hierarchy of results corresponding to country programme, programme component and projects, respectively.

Visibility

26. Visibility and recognition of organizations' contributions in a joint programme is often cited as a constraining factor. The Guidance Note attempts to address this gap by emphasizing that whatever the fund management mechanisms adopted, the joint programme should note the collective effort of the programme while giving due credit to all participating organizations. Visibility concerns are included in the legal agreements signed by participating organizations, and require the commitment of the lead organization to this same principle.

27. The legal documents for pooling and pass-through arrangements state clearly that, whatever the fund management arrangement, the roles and responsibilities of all participating organizations are clearly delineated. This is meant to address the concern that joint programmes were becoming a programme of the United Nations organization entrusted to negotiate with donors or take the lead in a given sector. The Guidance Note states that the common work plan should include a list of communication activities to publicize activities of the joint programme regularly.

III. Future directions for joint programming

28. The Guidance Note should be seen as an important step in the right direction and as an instrument to identify areas where further harmonization will be needed. United Nations organization presence and effectiveness and perhaps most importantly the will of Member States will greatly influence the success of joint programming and joint programmes.

Reporting

29. A group of financial experts from different United Nations organizations is already working on a common format for high-level financial reporting to donors for use in joint programmes, and has been mapping organizations' cost categories against high-level harmonized cost categories and developing a standard reporting template/format. The high-level financial reporting complements the narrative high-level report already developed and agreed to by Executive Committee organizations. Success in this effort will depend on donor willingness to accept this high-level common reporting format and frequency, as well as reports that do not necessarily identify specific donor contributions to a joint programme.

Consistent messages and support for harmonized procedures and cycles

30. Efforts of UNDG Executive Committee organizations must be matched with those of other United Nations organizations, which implies a responsibility on the part of Member States and bilateral donors. As members of the governing councils of organizations, they are in a key position to facilitate approval of policies and procedures that promote joint programming. Differences in delegation of authority and budgetary cycles that hamper joint programming should be ironed out.

31. Harmonization should be a continued commitment at all levels. Efforts to harmonize programming policies and procedures among organizations and to use improved national systems are still hampered by the proliferation of 'new' aid funding mechanisms, such as global funds. Each new mechanism comes with a set of procedures, requiring considerable efforts by national partners and organizations to adjust. The Guidance Note will be updated to incorporate lessons learned.

Innovative approaches in collaborative programming

32. In addition to joint programmes, United Nations organizations have worked together to increase their effectiveness and efficiencies. Examples include pooling funds to finance a cross-sectoral advisor to enhance integrated programming; studies and assessments covering multiple technical areas; and developing joint databases to track MDG indicators. The MDGs require collaboration between all partners, and have provided a platform for collaborative efforts in many countries.